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SOCIAL NETWORK AND LIFE SATISFACTION OF ELDERLY ALBERTANS

by

LAURA JONES

©

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine what facets of the social network of elderly Albertans are associated with the life satisifaction of the elderly. The three aspects of social network studied were size and frequency of network contact, perceived adequacy of network contact and perceived access to one's network.

The original data were collected in a series of interviews with 601 persons aged 55 years and older. The median age of the sample members was 72.5 years with a range from 55 to 96 years. There were 204 (34%) males and 397 (66%) females.

The theoretical framework chosen for this study was the exchange theory. The exchange theory is a conceptual framework which views human behavior and family behavior on the basis of rewards and costs. Exchange theory explains social interaction in terms of its outcomes or the rewards received and the costs incurred by each participant in the interaction.

This study was a survey which utilized secondary data analysis. The statistical tool used was exploratory data analysis. Box Plot found in SPSSX under MANOVA was used to further analyse the data.

The main results were; size and frequency of network

contact with one's network were not associated with the elderlys' life satisfaction. Perceived adequacy of contact with one's network is associated with the elderlys' life satisfaction. Perceived accessibility to one's network is associated with life satisfaction.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Canadian family structure is changing in many ways. More adults have elderly parents now than ever before. As the average age of the general population increases, more and more families contain three, four, or even five generations. In many instances, there will be two generations in the retirement years (Abu-Laban, 1978). Population experts predict the number and the proportion of elderly persons in the population will increase dramatically in the years to come with the greatest increases to be found among men and women over 75 (Cicirelli, 1980).

There are changes taking place that limit accessibility to family networks. Not only will there be an increase in the number of elderly persons, there is also a declining number of descendants to whom the elderly may turn, since people are having fewer and fewer children (Treas, 1974). Kin resources may become over extended in the day to day care of aging relating because there are fewer adult children to share the responsibility. Two cultural changes are also taking place that further limit the elderlys' accessibility to family networks. The first is that more women are entering the work force either through choice or necessity and, thus, they are less available to care for elderly family members. The second is the great value that is being placed

on personal freedom and independence. Increasingly, other obligations and constraints compete with duties toward elderly family members (Treas, 1977).

Thus, for the next two generations at least, there will be an increase in elderly people as most people are living longer. There will be a reduced number of descendants to whom an older person may turn to for assistance and, therefore, a decrease in resources for the elderly especially in the resource of family social network. Not only is there a decreased size of family network but there are needs of the elderly which may not be effectively addressed by the extended family, but require other types of social relationships. The emerging needs of future older people may have less to do with material needs and more to do with social and psychological needs. Needs such as the elderly's position in the culture, their use of time and the availability of meaningful roles in ongoing community life are becoming primary needs. Therefore, a social network broader than that of family resources is becoming a definite need of the elderly (Wood, 1978).

Social Networks and Life Satisfaction

A social network consists of a person's relationships with relatives, friends, neighbours, co-workers and other acquaintances who interact with the person. Each member of a

network does not necessarily know or interact with every other member and networks do not have clear boundaries (Mancini, 1980).

The elderlys' social network can go through a great many changes with friends dying and some of their children moving to other parts of the country. Widowhood and the residential mobility of adult children may severely diminish the content of the family role, while the death of peers and health and income problems may restrict involvement with friends and neighbours (Arling, 1976). Arling (1976) predicts that old age is accompanied by the prospect of increasing isolation. If elderly persons are facing changes in their social network, how is this affecting their life satisfaction? Satisfaction with life is generally recognized to be an important component in determining mental health (Medley, 1976). For this reason, researchers have long searched for physical correlates related to satisfaction with life (Medley, 1976). Although some losses of the elderly are physical losses, psychological losses such as the loss of social network relations may be more devasting to the elderly than some physical losses. "Supportive social networks affirm the function of an individual both as an object of affection and as a contributing member to the group" (Medley, 1976, p.450). The need for other social networks for the elderly is augmented by social forces increasing the separation of older

people and their family networks. It would seem it is important for the elderly to have access to social networks other than just family networks.

When researchers do examine the elderlys' social network, most studies are done on one element of the network. For example, research looks either at relationships between satisfaction with families or relationships with friends and neighbours, or relationships with confidants. The most effective route possibly would be to examine the social network as a whole and include all of the above relationships as well as the community social network. Social networks should be examined as a whole rather than by parts and pieces, as with most aspects of research you cannot get a true picture of something if you only examine the parts. To get a more realistic view of the social network we should examine the individuals interpersonal relationships (e.g. marital, family and kin and friends), as well as the degree of participation and integration into various organizational settings (e.g. church). Also, when examining a social network, we should not only look at human relationships but also look at the accessibility and availability of necessary services (Mancini, 1980). When we examine the availability of necessary services, we take into consideration the amount of dependence an elderly person may have on their family or friendship and neighbour networks.

The purpose of this study was to determine what facets of the social network of elderly Albertans were associated with the life satisfaction of the elderly.

Definitions

Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction is defined as a perceived adequacy of life and is measured by the scores received on the life satisfaction scale (Appendix B).

Social Network

For this study, social network of the elderly is defined as having four reference groups which are children, neighbours, friends and confidants.

Elderly

Elderly are defined as those persons 55 years and older.

CHAPTER II

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The exchange theory (Nye, 1979) is a conceptual framework in which human behaviour and family behaviour is viewed on the basis of rewards and costs. Exchange theory explains social interaction in terms of its outcomes, the rewards received and the costs incurred by each participant in the interaction. The exchange theory is particularly useful in studying the social network of the elderly, since the elderly as well as other age groups can weigh costs and rewards of each relationship and determine which of these relationships is particularly important to the elderly and their life satisfaction. All social interaction may be viewed as an exchange between two social actors. Human behaviour tends to be oriented towards the expectations of other people. Human behavior also is motivated by a desire to maximize one's rewards and to minimize one's costs. People tend to avoid the undesirable and to seek that which is perceived as pleasant or rewarding (Dowd, 1980).

Social interaction is the principal medium through which activities and sentiments are exchanged. People are interdependent with one another and, therefore, necessarily exchange things (Dowd, 1980). As social interaction involves individuals, it is individuals who constitute the major source of both our rewards and our costs. The means by which

most rewards are obtained is through interaction with other people. "An exchange approach to social interaction involves a specific concern with the reciprocal flow of valued behaviour between the participants" (Dowd, 1980, p.597). When looking at relationships, one must consider the costs and rewards and also to look at the expectations of the relationship by the participants.

As one begins to view social interaction as primarily an exchange of resources, there are two questions that eventually must be answered. What constitutes a reasonable or satisfactory exchange? How do individuals come to decide the basis and rules by which exchange is conducted? A reasonable exchange is determined by what individuals come to accept as reasonable based upon previous experience in a similar situation or knowledge of others in similar situations (Dowd, 1980). The elderly may perceive their social networks as adding to their life satisfaction if, in fact, they perceive their relationships with family and friends as more rewarding by comparison with those of others. How exchange rules come into being is through negotiation by social actors, each having a certain amount of power resources. In the case of the elderly, there is negotiation or the balancing of costs and rewards. The nature and degree of power resources held by an individual is a function of several factors, which includes the individual's class

position, social network and personal characteristics. Often status characteristics such as age and sex becomes a factor in negotiations and exchanges. The elderlys' network may also have undergone a change. A possible change in the family network structure may bring about a loss or gain of power resources. Questions which need to be asked are do we obtain conflict in data due to the "fair exchange rate" concept? Fair exchange is defined as what one person may view as acceptable and adequate may be totally unacceptable by another individual. Conflicting research data may develop because what one person may feel is a good relationship, that is, where rewards outweigh costs, another individual may find that same relationship totally inadequate. Expectations of the relationship play a major role in determining whether an individual perceives the relationship as having a fair rate of exchange. Therefore, it is possible elderlys' satisfaction with their social network is affected by how they perceive the rate of exchange.

Status Characteristics and Exchange

Age and sex are examples of status characteristics. Any status characteristic of an individual, such as the person's age or sex may become a factor in the negotiation of exchange rates. Age is an "exportable" characteristic, one which accompanies the person and is used to evaluate the legitimacy

of his or her claims for a certain level of reward. The meaning and value attributed to a status characteristic are rarely inherent in the characteristic itself but, instead, are defined in the give and take of social interaction. Thus, "the value attributable to old age (whether it becomes a liability or an asset in social exchange) varies from culture to culture and from one historical era to another" (Dowd, 1980, p.598). In some cultures the aged are revered, however, in the North American culture youth is rewarded. Growing old receives negative connotations from society (Dowd, 1980). These exportable characteristics would affect the elderlys' perceived adequacy of contact and their life satisfaction. These exportable characteristics often determine what power the elderly have in a relationship. These characterstics have either a negative or positive influence in determining the amount of power an elderly will have in a relationship. "The actor with the greater power is better able to dictate the terms of the exchange" (Dowd, 1980, p.598). The aged, in dealing with their family networks, may find themselves on the bottom level of power while with confidants, age cohorts, neighbours, friends and relatives of their own age, the elderly may perceive their power levels equal to them and find these negotiations and relationships more positive. These relationships would probably add to the general life satisfaction of the elderly.

"Exportable characteristics operate to influence others perceptions not only of a person's abilities that presumably relate to the characteristic, but also of abilities that do not" (Dowd, 1980, p.599). For example, without knowledge of an old person's strength, many presume weakness. We may assume ideas about the elderly. We may perceive them as needing help, being frail and wanting relationships; when perhaps the elderly only wish to be respected and be independent. Exportable characteristics lower or raise the power of the negotiation. The effects of this lowered power status generalization on the actor is to weaken his or her bargaining position in exchange negotiations. The stronger partner will tend to place "the burden of proof" on the other member to demonstrate that her investments (and, therefore, the legitimacy of her claim for a certain level of rewards) should not be discounted due to her possession of the devalued characteristic (Dowd, 1980).

As a result of these processes, many aged are doubly disadvantaged in their social exchange relationships. On the one hand, their access to several categories of exchange resources tends to decline with age thus placing the old person in a position of fewer sources to choose for negotiating. These fewer resources may force the elderly into relationships which may not be gratifying simply because they have no other choice. On the other hand, the resources that

the older person does possess are perceived as less valuable because of the "burden of proof" principle. Because of the actor's age, the value of the resources must be demonstrated, thus the burden of proof often falls on the elderly (Dowd, 1980). This "burden of proof" principle may affect the elderly's perceived adequacy of contact and thus their life satisfaction. Certainly, as a group, the aged in modern society are among those who routinely fail to achieve a proportionality between their investments and profits. "Old people have invested their lives in the society through regular fulfillment of work and family responsibilities. Yet their rewards in terms of income, prestige, or autonomy fall far below usual definitions of proportionality" (Dowd, 1980, p.600). Where is the power of the elderly in relationships? Indeed, some age segregation is maintained by old people themselves as a strategy of minimizing the costs inherent in social exchange (Dowd, 1981). In fact, interaction with age peers is the general rule for all age groups, which suggest that such a pattern is found to be rewarding for most people regardless of age. The main principle is clear. Different age groups have interests and resources of their own, which they can maximally enjoy in their own company. Possessing similar interests and sharing similar resources, the aged like other age groups tend to interact most frequently and possibly most successfully with their age peers. Said

differently, preferred exchange relations tend to form among partners of similar power. Possible imbalanced power exchanges (such as may be found with family networks) may prove to be generally unsatisfying for the partner with lower power who is often the elderly. Related to this is the fact that since old people often have fewer resources that would be perceived as rewarding to the middle-aged, they tend not to have access to the opportunity structures governing interaction among those in mid-life. When a person has few, if any, resources to exchange, it becomes less likely that the person will meet potential exchange partners (Dowd, 1980). "Age segregation serves to erect boundaries among different age groups. These boundaries are both physical and social in nature and serve as an obstacle to interaction. Intergenerational (or cross-age) social interaction requires, in effect, a boundary crossing" (Dowd, 1980, p.600).

One may conclude from this analysis that, even if the older person chooses to remain engaged in the mainstream of social life through intergenerational contact, the age boundary could remain an obstacle. One reason for this involves the preference of individuals for exchange partners similar to them in power. However, a second reason concerns the necessity of having to negotiate an age-relevant exchange rate and, related to this, the necessity of having to decide the appropriate rule for exchange. Thus, part of the barrier

underlying the age boundary is the absence of routine expectations; that which is taken-for-granted in relations with age peers must be clarified and agreed upon. Anderson and Davis (1979) suggest that the crossing of age boundaries is a journey that carries with it considerable costs. Because of the power differential generally existing between age groups, it is the middle-aged group that assumes its discourse will dominate in its dealings with the aged. Thus the elderly are walking into a relationship with each partner having preconceived ideas of how the relationship should be conducted. This is normal in any relationship, however, the elderly may be entering these relationships having a negative burden upon them. Some characteristics such as age may have unfounded negative connotations. Another way to look at this problem is that not only can the elderly be on the losing side of the relationship but so can the middle-aged child. The relationship can be costly to the middle-aged if they are being forced to help when they can't or don't wish to. These negative feelings may be transmitted to the elderly through verbal and non verbal communication. The elderly may, therefore, be penalized twice in a relationship; once for the lack of power in the relationship and second for perceiving resentment about the relationship from the middle-aged child. These two facts added together may cause the elderly to perceive their networks as inadequate and thus cause lower

life satisfaction.

Summary

An exchange analysis indicates that friendships among one's own age group are more likely to be profitable for the old person and consequently associated with life satisfaction. Because of tendencies toward status generalization, the aged face more difficulties in cross-age interaction than do middle-aged persons. The older social actor has fewer resources to exchange and those that are accepted fail to command a share of rewards commensurate to their preferred exchange value. A question of this study is in what relationships do the elderly choose to invest their energy. Do the elderly have family networks where fair exchange rates are difficult because of power unbalance? Would it be more profitable and more rewarding to choose a relationship with a friend or confidant where the elderly might have equal power and where there are established rules and are these potentially profitable exchanges associated with high life satisfaction?

CHAPTER III

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Size and Frequency of Network Contact and Life Satisfaction

There is a growing body of literature concerning the network interaction by the elderly. Much research has been on size and frequency of contact. New areas of research included the perceived adequacy of contact and perceived accessibility to members. In this chapter, the literature will be reviewed in the above three areas.

Much research has been completed on the elderly and their social network. Evidence shows that the elderly have contact with their children and that the majority are neither neglected nor isolated from family networks. So why study the social network of the elderly? There is a general belief in North America that the family is an important part of the elderlys' life and that family relationships add to the general life satisfaction of the elderly. However, researchers continue to generate conflicting data concerning the relationship between network size and contact and life satisfaction of the elderly.

Older people in North America typically live near (but rarely with) at least one child and interact frequently with their children. Thus elderly and their children do have a definite exchange, even though there may be an imbalance of power (Shanas et al., 1968; Bultena, 1969; Hill, 1970;

Shanas, 1973; Arling, 1976; Petrowsky, 1976). There is little doubt that, in general, elderly parents and their adult children play important roles in one another's lives (Lee, 1982). It has been well established in western countries that relationships between parents and children often continue to be close in later life and that children are important sources of practical and emotional support to the elderly (Synge, 1981).

Yet despite these findings, studies completed on the relationship between family interaction and life satisfaction has not been clearly defined. Lee, (1982) felt that difference in results may be due to the fact that most studies have measured interaction in terms of quantity and/or frequency ignoring other dimensions of these relationships. He completed a study on the exchange of aid between older persons and their children. His results support the concept that interaction with kin has no demonstrable consequence for the emotional well being of the elderly.

Both Arling (1976) and Edwards (1978) found that contact with family members especially children was not related to life satisfaction. Two reasons have been offered for the apparent lack of association between family contact and life satisfaction. The first is that elderly people and their children have contrasting interests and thus often do not make good companions. Generational differences in

socialization and contrasting life styles result in a dissimilar set of experiences. There can be substantial differences in their daily activities, friendship networks, norms and values. The second difficulty arising from the relations between generations, is the dependency of the elderly person and the resultant reversal of roles that often takes place between parent and child (Arling, 1976). However, some researchers have found some associations between life satisfaction and contact with children and other relatives (Mancini, 1980). Also Medley (1976) found that satisfaction with family life made the greatest single positive impact on satisfaction with life for each sex.

The evidence indicates that most elderly understand and comply with the norms for older-parent/adult child relationships. These norms specify that older parents recognize the right of their adult children to lead their own lives. Many parents believe that, if they are too demanding, they will alienate their children. At the same time, adult children are expected to leave behind their emancipation oriented behaviour of early adulthood and to turn again to their parents "no longer as a child", but as a mature adult with a new role and a different love, seeing him for the first time as a individual with his own rights, needs, limitations, and a life history that made him the person he is long before his child existed.

In conclusion, when we look only at family networks or friendship networks or just parts of the network, we are more likely to get conflicting data. When we look at only parts of a whole, unless all parts are included, we do not get a true picture. The part we omit or do not look at may be the important key to understanding the whole network. This may be especially important if one part of a network is compensating for lack of another.

Why do we as researchers achieve conflicting data when we are measuring family networks? When we examine research such as that done by Mancini (1980) and Arling (1976) who both found that life satisfaction is not necessarily enhanced by family interaction; and we compare it to Medley's 1976 study where his result was that satisfaction with family was found to make the greatest single impact on life satisfaction, we know such different results can be obtained. The difference can be due to the sample and different instruments. Arling used only widows, Mancini used a random sample of older adults in a public housing complex, and Medley used a portion of data collected from a very large national probability sample of person's aged 18 and over living in non-institutional dwelling units. Even though all three researchers used interviews as their method of obtaining data, they may have measured different constructs since they all used a different questionnaire.

Relationships with family and friends and neighbours, involve separate realms of activity which compliment each other, but which cannot ordinarily be substituted for one another. Those older people with strong family ties are just as likely to be integrated into a friendship network as those elderly who have no family or have infrequent contact with their relatives (Arling, 1976).

According to Blau (1973) the older individual must find replacements for work and marriage among peers of the same age who share common needs, interest and experiences. After widowhood and retirement, old people need relationships with others who appreciate them and share their needs and interests. These roles can be filled by their contemporaries. Not only do friends have the advantage of being contemporaries who have interests and experiences in common, they are also equals, because friendships rest on mutual choice and mutual need and involves a voluntary exchange of sociability between equals. Peer relationships sustain a persons sense of usefulness and self esteem more effectively than filial relationships (Wood, 1978).

Arling (1976) in his study of elderly widows reported that contact with family members, especially children was not associated with life satisfaction and morale while friendships and neighbourhood contacts were negatively related to loneliness and worry and positively related to feelings of

usefuleness and individual respect within the community. He suggests that friendship and neighbour relationships are more satisfying to the elderly widow because these relationships are based upon common interests and life styles while her family ties may be marked by dissimilar concerns and interests. Moreover, friendship normally develops voluntarily and is characterized by an equal ability to exchange assistance. In addition, neighbours, because of their close proximity, are best suited to provide immediate assistance, whereas both friends and neighbours provide a reference group and sociability based upon consensus (Wood, 1978).

Most studies in the gerontological literature have been concerned with the quantity of relations of the old but have given little attention to the quality of these relations. A confidant relation may be highly related to life satisfaction since confidant implies intimacy and support. A confidant is someone you can completely trust and confide in. Mancini (1980) states that the one most important aspect of life satisfaction may be the contact with one's confidant. A confidant relationship would probably be one of equal needs, interests and equal power. What we do know about confidant relationships and quantity of contact with the elderly is as follows: Tigges (1980) found that most elderly people had a confidant drawn from among friends, neighbours or relatives.

The number of relatives the elderly person had in the community significantly influenced the likelihood of having a relative as a confidant. Those with few relatives were over two times as likely as those with ten or more relatives to be without a relative as a confidant. Women were more likely than men to be confidant relatives by a ratio of 6 to 4. Sex of respondent appears to be strongest factor influencing sex of confidant. Women were most likely to have women relatives as confidants. Men were as likely to have female relatives than male relatives for confidants. Women are probably more often the confidant. The availability and accessibility of a confidant would probably have an affect on life satisfaction.

Perceived Adequacy of Contact and Life Satisfaction

Researchers have done some assessment of the relationships between the amount of contact with various aspects of social network and some research has been done on quality of contact. However, less has been done on the perceived adequacy of that contact.

In a study of social network interaction among older adults, Mancini (1980) found 58% of the sample wanted additional personal contact with children and about 33% more personal contact with other network groups. The amount of personal contact with friends and family related positively to life satisfication among those who did not desire more contact but negatively among those who did desire more

contact but negatively among those who did desire more contact. He concluded that contact was not related to life satisfaction but instead the important mediating factor was the desire for more contact. In fact, it is those older people who have expected to have close interpersonal relationships with their children who feel most isolated and neglected (Binstock, 1976). Elderly people who desired more contact with their social network would probably have lower life satisfaction in general.

Perceived Access to Network

When we look at perceived access through the exchange framework, it is noted that in order to achieve and exchange one must have access to her/his network. This exchange can be achieved by telephone, in person, or in letters, but there must be contact. Social interaction is the principal medium through which activities and sentiments are exchanged. People are interdependent with one another and, therefore, necessarily exchange things (Dowd, 1980). The means by which most rewards are obtained is through interaction with other people. Therefore, we must have perceived access to our networks. Most research dealing with the social network of the elderly has looked at size and freqency, some research has been completed on perceived adequacy of social network but little research has been completed on perceived access to network.

Summary

Research on the elderly and their network have shown that elderly people have contact with their children and play important roles in one another's lives. Interaction with kin has no demonstrable consequence for the emotional well being of the elderly. Also, friendship and neighbourhood contacts are related to life satisfaction. It is also known the amount of personal contact with friends and family relates positively to life satisfaction among those who do not desire more contact. Contact is not related to life satisfaction but instead, the important mediating factor is the desire for more contact.

Family relationships do fulfill a role, but it is not clear whether this relationship is satisfying to the elderly. Perhaps it is contact with the confidant and friendship networks that provides the elderly with a positive life satisfaction. On the other hand, maybe it may not matter how active the elderly are in their neighbourhood and community; nor how often the elderly see their friends and children if the real underlying need is for more contact. No matter how much contact is already received the amount desired determines satisfaction with life. The purpose of this study is:

1. To examine the relationship between size and frequency of network contact and life satisfaction.

2. To examine the relationship between perceived adequacy of network contact and life satisfaction.

3. To examine the relationship between perceived access to networks and life satisfaction.

CHAPTER IV

METHOD

Sample

Data was collected in a series of in-depth interviews with 601 persons aged 55 years and older from the fall of 1979 to the fall of 1983. One hundred and twenty two Family Studies students were trained in interview techniques and each student was to locate and interview five people. For each interviewer their five subjects had to fit the following characteristics: they must be over 55 years old and no more than two interviews should be with people in institutions such as a nursing home or continuing care facility. The interview was usually conducted in the respondent's home and was of approximately two hours duration. The median age of the sample members was 72.5 years with a range of 55 years to 96 years old. There were 204 (34%) males and 397 (66%) females with a total of 601 persons.

Sample Description

Amount of Education	%	N
No formal	3	15
1 - 8 years	32	190
9 - 11 years	23	141
High school	12	74
Post secondary	30	181

Yearly Family Income	%	N
Less than 10,000.	34	257
10,000. - 19,999.	27	194
20,000. - 29,999.	9	56
30,000. and over	6	37
Did not report income	10	57

Marital Status	%	N
Married	47	285
Divorced	3	18
Separated	2	10
Widowed	43	256
Single	5	32

Employment Status	%	N
Employed	5	28
Retired	60	362
Housewives	28	166
Other	8	44

Representativeness of the Sample

A comparison of the foregoing sample characteristic to those of the overall Canadian population of elderly (Statistics Canada, 1979) would suggest that the sample is fairly representative of older Canadians.

This study had 34% males and 66% females. This compares to a sex composition of 43.1% males and 56.9% females in the Canadian population for those over the age of sixty five.

In terms of marital status, 47% were married or separated, whereas the Canadian population statistics show 56.8% of the elderly are married or separated. Single respondents comprised 5% compared to 9.9% in the Canadian population. Divorce participants totalled 3% compared to 1.1% in Canada and the widowed represented 43% of the sample compared to 37.5% revealed in the Canadian Statistics. The average yearly income for this population was approximately $8,600.00 and, in Canada, the average income of the elderly is reported as $7,489.00 per annum. Although the sample characteristics are similar to those of older Canadians, the sample was not randomly drawn. Therefore, it is not appropriate to generalize beyond this sample.

Materials

This study is a survey which utilized secondary analysis research technique. Secondary analysis is the extraction of

knowledge in topics other than those which were the focus of the original survey.

The reasons for choice of secondary analysis were as follows:

1. It was more economical and time saving than doing primary research.
2. It allowed for a large Alberta data base; and
3. It allowed for an in-depth look at several aspects of the social network.

One limitation of secondary analysis is that it is restricted by the nature and quality of the original study. A secondary survey demands high external validity since it has lower internal validity. There were no measures of validity or reliability run on these data and thus we are unable to obtain either for this study.

Data Analysis

Data for this analysis was taken from a study of the needs and resources of elderly Albertans conducted from the spring of 1981 to the fall of 1984. The original questionnaire was developed at Syracuse University. The questionnaire contains several pretested scales.

There were 238 items in that study's questionnaire, each representing an independent variable. The investigator decided to focus on 18 variables related to social network.

They are outlined in the Results section and listed in Appendix A. "Box plots" found in the SPSSX manual under MANOVA (SPSS INC, 1983) were run for each of the 18 variables being considered. The print out from this program summarizes the elderlys' responses and gives some indication of relationships between these variables and life satisfaction. A trend or concept can often be noted more easily and quickly from a visual display like box plots than through mathematical interpretations. The use of box plots is more suitable for generating studies than testing hypothesis. However, there is no general rule to decide on the significance of displayed relationships and thus, interpretations can vary greatly by individuals. One basic rule that has been established is the use of medians. If a median from one category is above the midbox of another category, a difference can be noted. Assumptions can also be made if the median of one category falls in the range of the uppper or lower quartile of another category.

Box plots were chosen specifically for this study since the investigator could not understand why we received conflicting data from studies of the elderly concerning their network. The investigator felt we should retrace our steps and re-examine the variables which are studied and possibly we have taken the wrong path. Box plots enable a researcher to interpret a large amount of data and to possibly generate

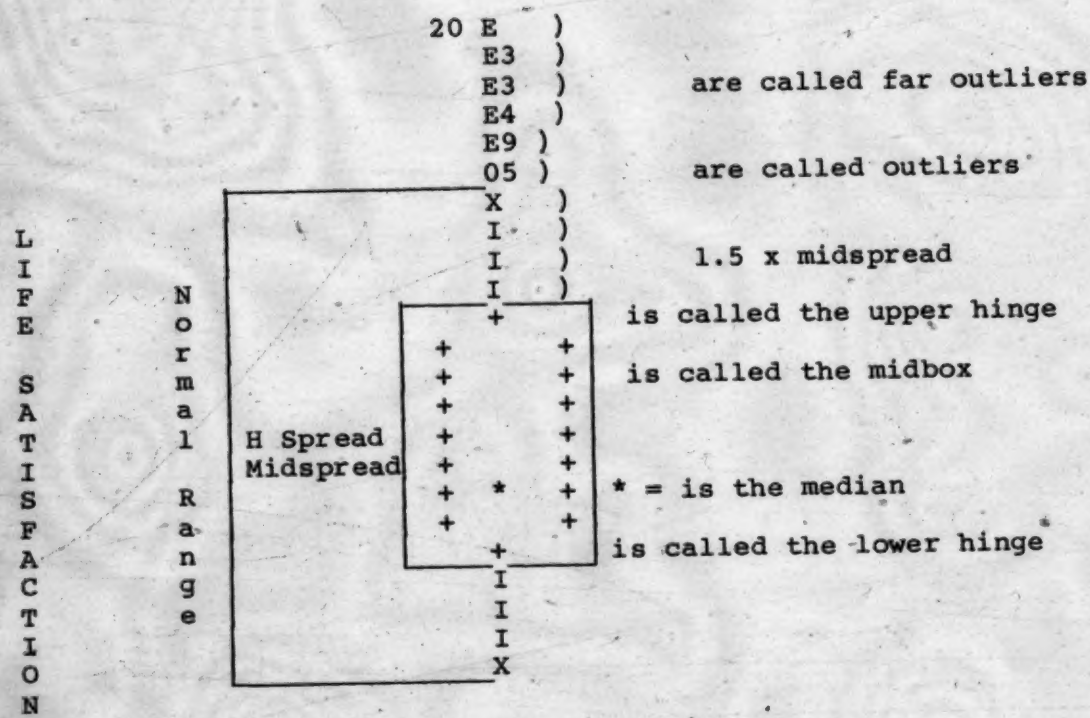
new hypothesis concerning the study of the elderly and their network.

Description of Box Plot

The values of importance to examine in the box plot for this study are the H spread, outliers normal range and the median. See diagram one. H spread is calculated by taking difference between values on the Y scale equal to the hinges. The H spread is a total of scores to equal 50% of the scores. By examining the length of the H spread, a researcher can see how many of the scores were necessary to achieve 50% of the score. It allows the researcher to see if there are upward trends of the scores if we find scores being on the upper level of the Y scale.

Adjacent observations are one step outside hinges. These are called outliers. One step is equal to 1.5 x the midspread score. Far outliers are those 2 x the midspread score. The normal range is the distance between the x's. Thus the median and spread (size of the normal range) can be seen at a glance. We can also spot upward or downward trends and many sorts of asymmetry. Also at a glance, observations straying from the main body of the data, whether or not they are extremes can be denoted.

BOX PLOT (DIAGRAM 1)



Y X = Independent Variable

CHAPTER V

RESULTS

Life Satisfaction

The dependent variable was the result of a factor analysis completed on the initial questionnaire. All variables included in the factor analysis are included in Appendix A. The results of the factor analysis are contained in Appendix B. A good scale eliminates all factors where the factor loading value is below .5. Six variables were chosen (see Appendices B and C) to compile a Life Satisfaction scale. The scores of these six variables were added to form the one dependant variable, life satisfaction.

Social Network

The experimenter reviewed all eighteen variables and divided them into three logical groupings based on the experimenter's judgement. The size and frequency of network contact, perceived adequacy of network contact, and perceived access to networks. All have been calculated on the dependent variable of life satisfaction to produce box plots. The major headings of the box plots are:

Size and frequency of network contact

Perceived adequacy of network contact

Perceived access to network

Frequencies of Life Satisfaction

Value	Frequency
4.00	2
5.00	8
6.00	5
7.00	8
8.00	14
9.00	10
10.00	22
11.00	30
12.00	52
13.00	67
14.00	83
15.00	105
16.00	78
17.00	64
18.00	46

The median of the data is 14.00. There is a skewed curve to higher life satisfaction. There are 10 people below the value of 6 due to missing data.

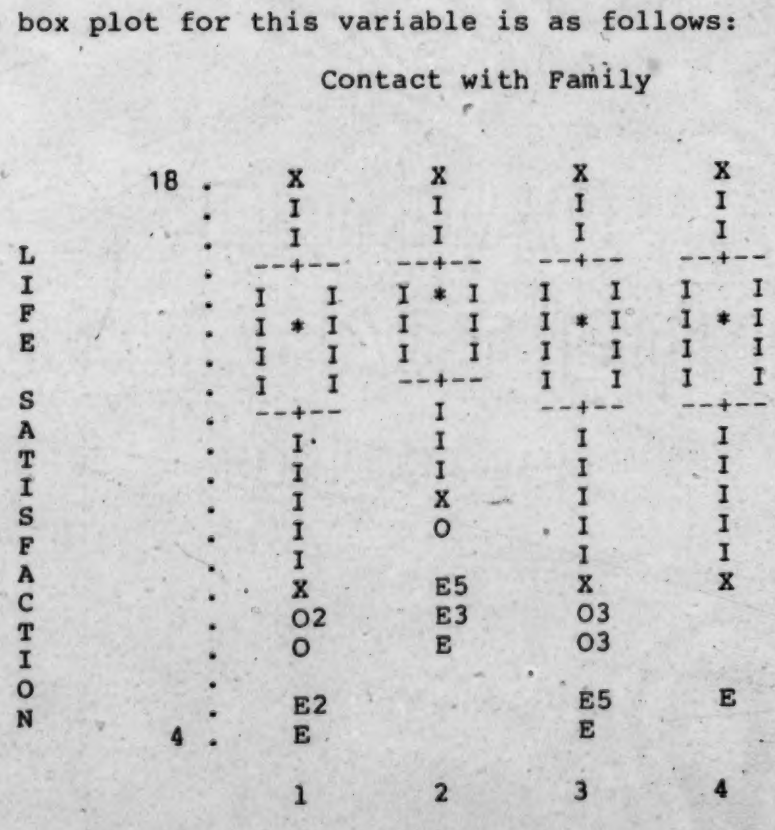
Size and Frequency of Network Contact

Variable 1: Visiting with members in your family.

How often did you visit, in person, with a member of your family last week?

		%	N
1.	everyday	18	107
2.	a few times a week	33	199
3.	once a week	28	169
4.	not at all	20	121

The box plot for this variable is as follows:

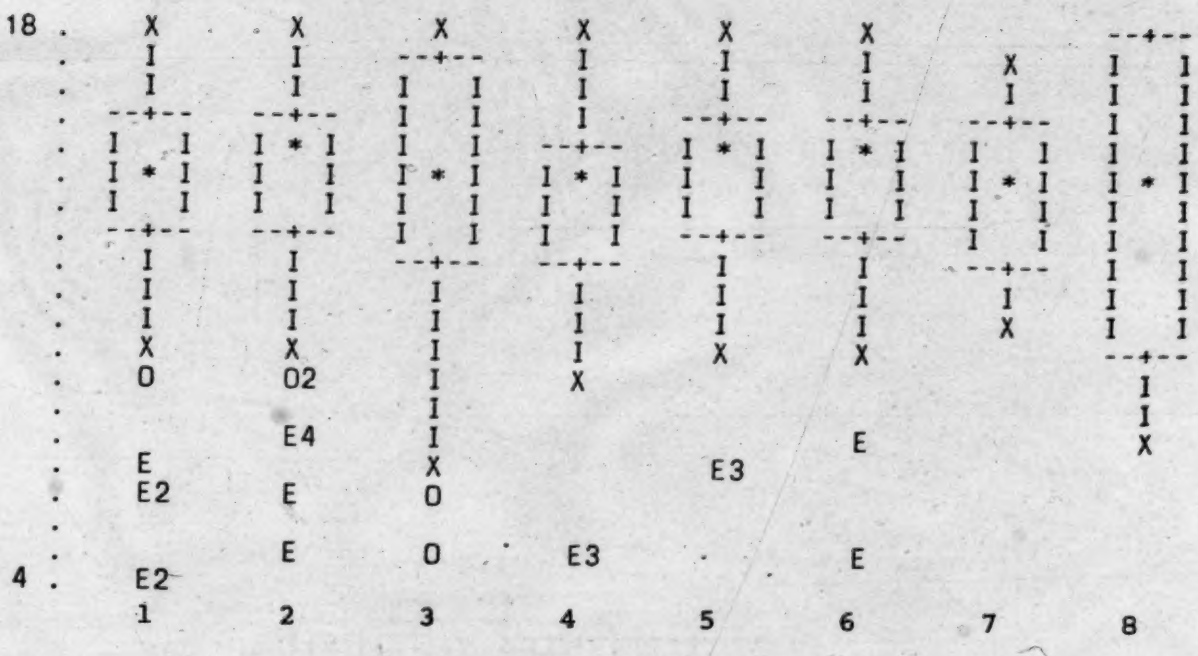


The medians are approximately the same for all four categories. The H spread (50% of scores) is the same for category 1, 3 and 4. There are outliers on all four categories but most on category 1 and 3. The normal range, amount between x's is approximately the same except for category 2 where the range is in the higher satisfied range.

Variable 2: How many children do you have that are still living?

	%	N
1. 0	10	62
2. 1	12	73
3. 2	25	148
4. 3	22	131
5. 4	14	84
6. 5	6	37
7. 6	5	31
8. 7	2	11

Number of Children Still Living



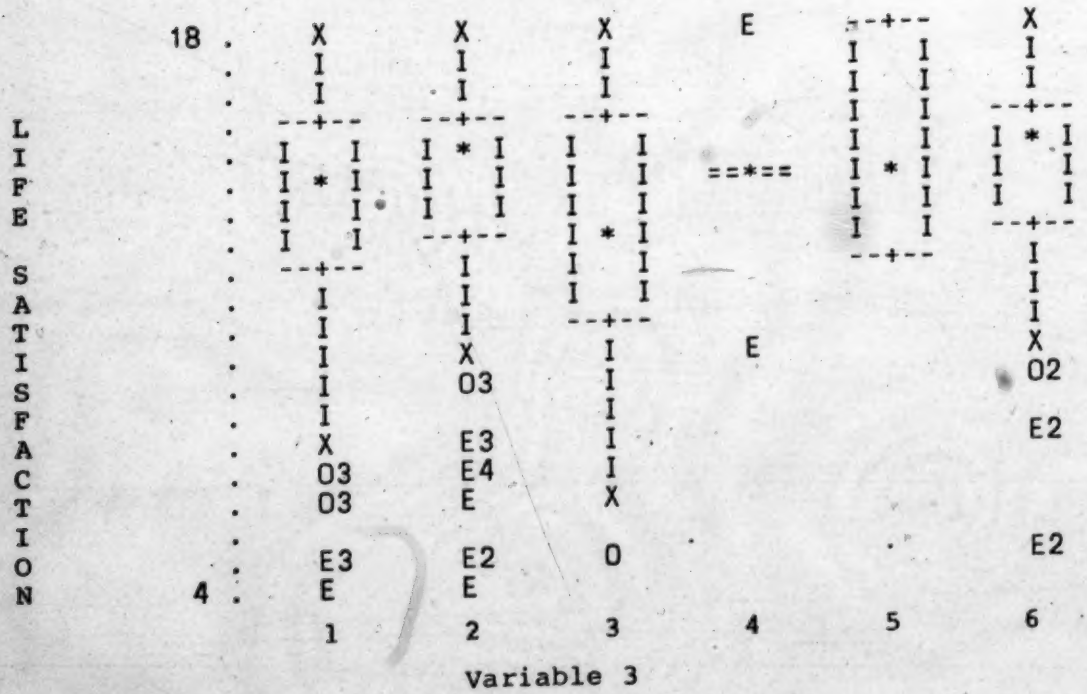
Variable 2

The medians for all categories is approximately the same. The H spread for categories 3 and 8 are the largest. The ranges for all categories except 3 and 8 are approximately the same. There are the most outliers in categories 1 and 2.

Variable 3: Amount child contacted (seen, phone call or letter).

		%	N
1.	today	43	256
2.	within past week	39	236
3.	within past month	5	27
4.	several times per year	1	6
5.	never	5	3
6.	no children	11	64

Amount Child Contacted

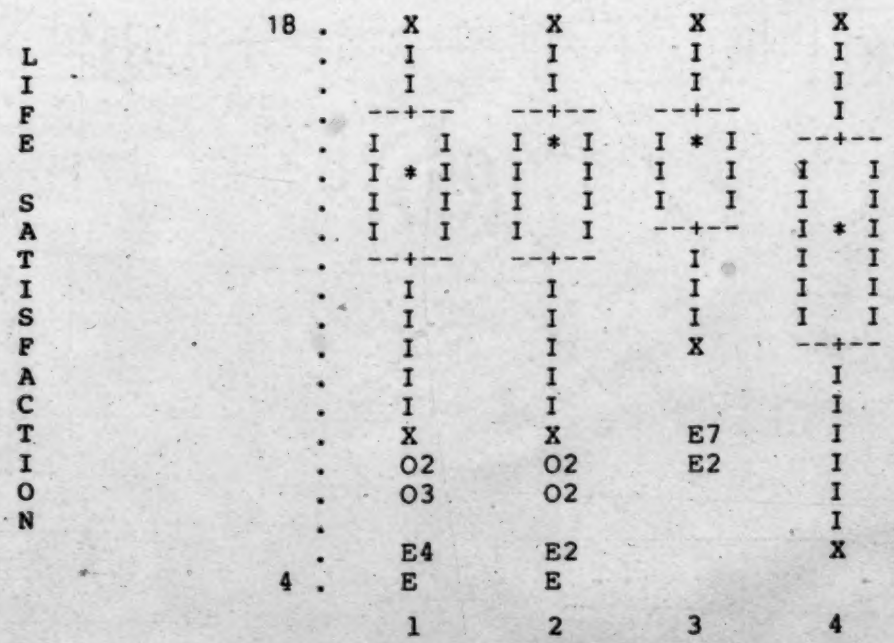


The median for category 3 is in the lower quartile of category 1 and the bottom hinge of category 2. The H spread for categories 3 and 5 is the largest. The range for category 3 is the largest. The most outliers are in categories 1 and 2.

Variable 4: About how many people do you consider close friends?

		%	N
1.	1 - 5	42	253
2.	6 - 10	25	152
3.	11 or more	27	161
4.	none	05	29

Number of Close Friends

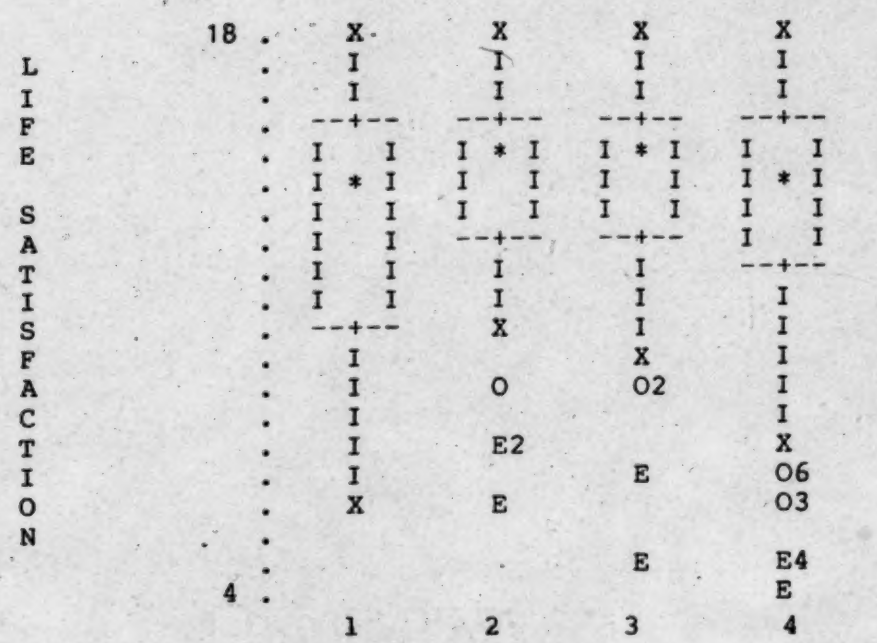


The medians for categories 1, 2 and 3 are equal. The median for category 4 is on the lower quartile of category 1 and 2 and on the lower hinge of category 3. The H spread is larger in category 4 and smallest in category 3. The most outliers are in categories 1 and 2. The range is the smallest in category 3, and the range is the largest in category 4.

Variable 5: About how often do you go to visit these friends in their homes?

	%	N
1. daily	4	26
2. weekly	19	114
3. several times a month	26	158
4. several times in one year	42	254

Visiting Friends in Homes



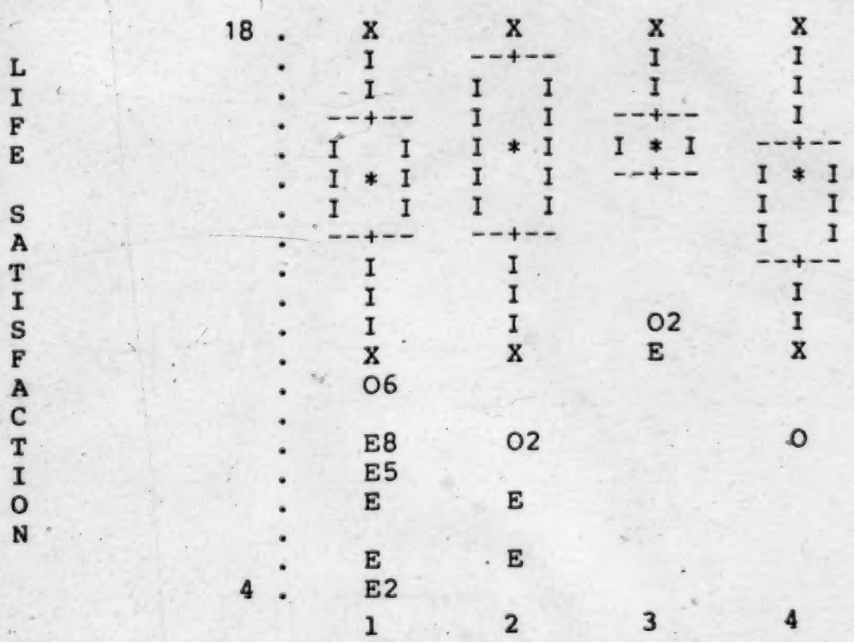
Variable 5

The medians for all four categories are approximately the same. The H spread for category 1 is the largest. The most outliers are in category 4. The range for category 1 is the largest.

Variable 6: About how many neighbours would you say are your personal friends?

		%	N
1.	1 - 5	50	302
2.	6 - 10	11	65
3.	11 or more	5	30
4.	none	7	44

Number of Neighbours who are Personal Friends



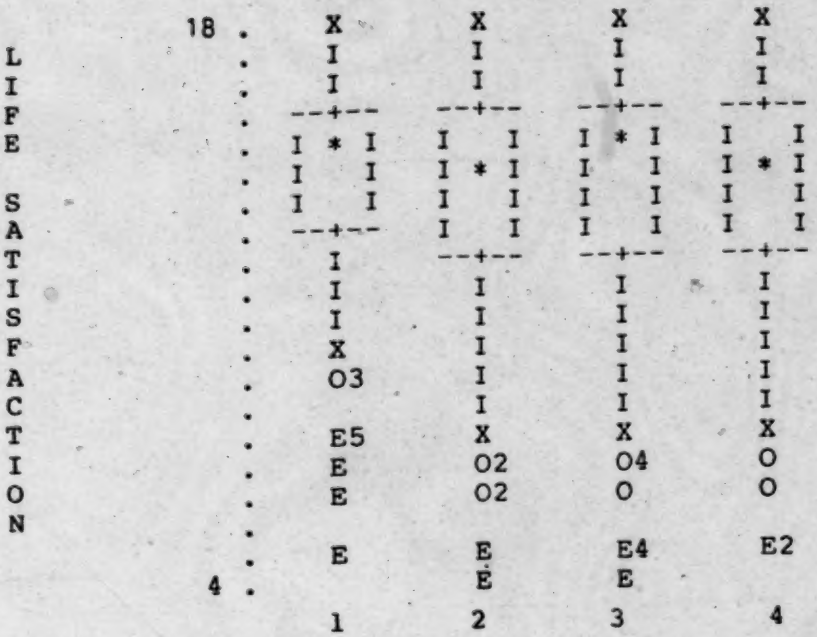
Variable 6

The medians for this category are approximately the same. The H spread for category 2 is the largest. The H spreads are quite different. The most outliers are in category 1. The range for all three categories are approximately the same.

Variable 7: Of all your neighbours, about how many do you know well enough to visit with?

		%	N
1.	5 or more	43	258
2.	3 or 4	24	143
3.	1 or 2	21	124
4.	none	13	76

Number of Neighbours Known



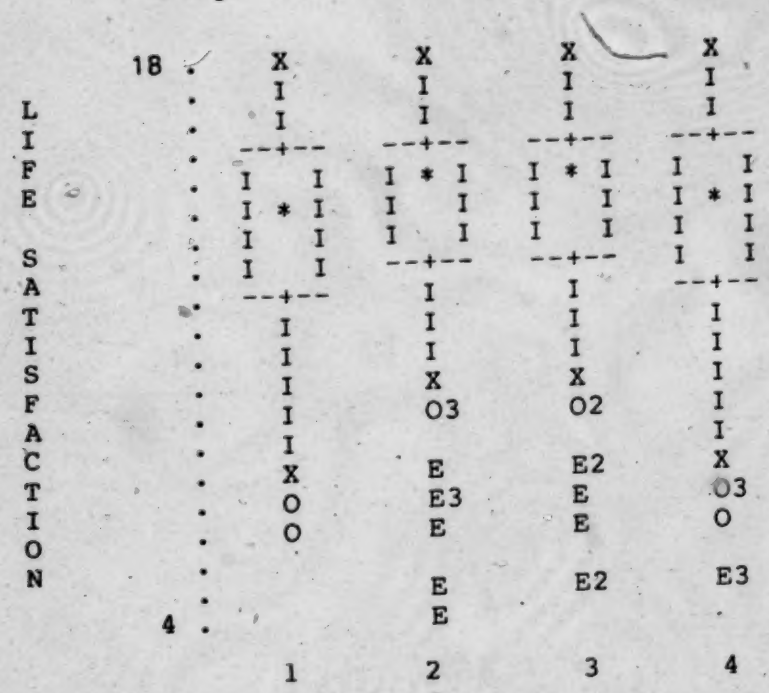
Variable 7

The medians for this variable are approximately the same. The H spread for this variable is approximately the same. There are outliers in all 4 categories but the most outliers are in category 1. The range of category 1 is the smallest. The range of categories 2, 3 and 4 are approximately the same.

Variable 8: About how often do your neighbours come to visit in your home?

	%	N
1. daily	12	74
2. weekly	24	147
3. several times a month	20	122
4. several times in one year	32	199

Neighbours Visiting in Your Own Home



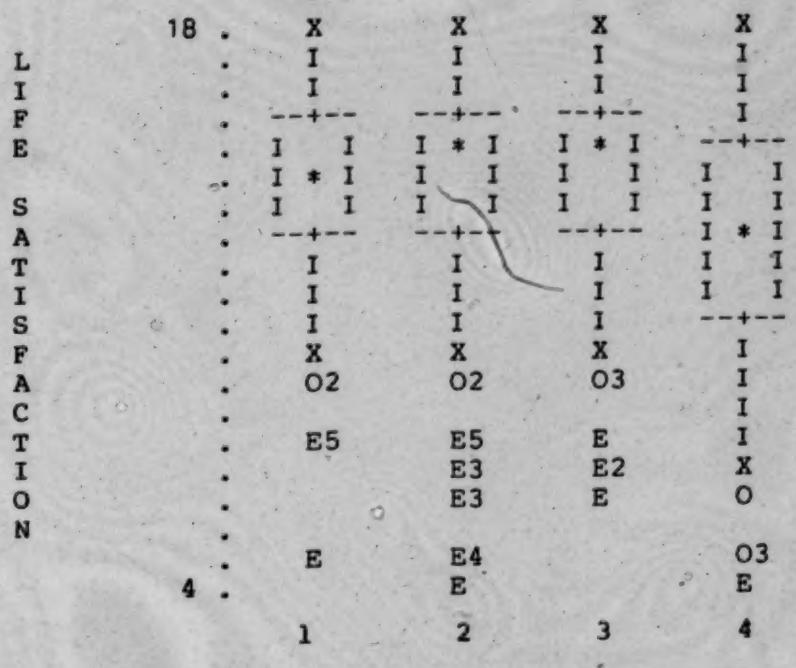
Variable 8

The medians for this variable are approximately the same. The H spread for all 4 categories are approximately equal. The most outliers are in categories 2 and 3. The range for categories 1 and 4 are approximately the same, as well as the same for categories 2 and 3.

Variable 9: How often did you visit with your friends and neighbours last week?

	%	N
1. every day	22	136
2. a few times	42	252
3. once	19	114
4. not at all	16	98

Contact with Friends and Neighbours



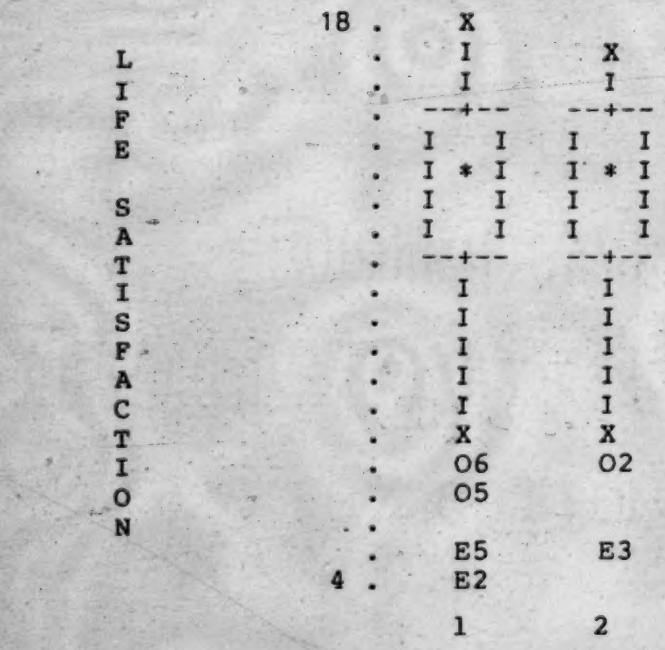
Variable 9

Medians and H spread for categories 1, 2 and 3 are approximately the same. The median for category 4 is on the lower hinge of all 3 other categories. The H spread for this category is the largest. There are the most outliers in category 2. The midspread for categories 1, 2 and 3 are approximately the same. The range for category 4 is from approximately 6 to 18.

Variable 10: Is there one person that you feel particularly close to...that is somebody that you can be completely yourself with and in whom you have complete trust and confidence?

		%	N
1.	yes	93	558
2.	no	7	41

Presence of Confidant



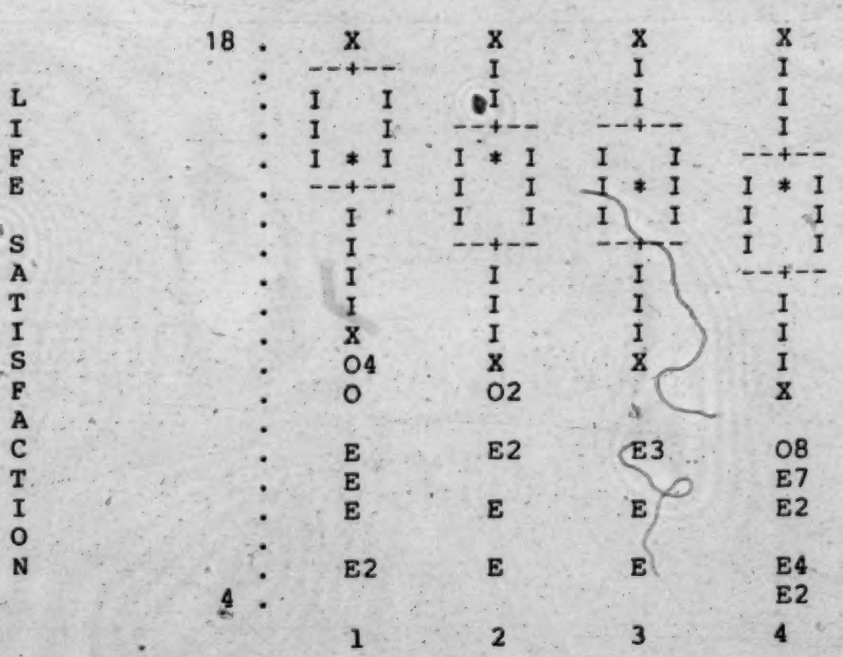
Variable 10

The median, H spread and range for both categories are approximately the same. There are more outliers in category one.

Variable 11: About how often do you go to meetings or activities of clubs, other organizations or informal gatherings or groups?

		%	N
1.	a few times a week	26	153
2.	once a week	19	113
3.	2 or 3 times a month	14	87
4.	once a month or less	40	241

Contact with Clubs and Organizations



Variable 11

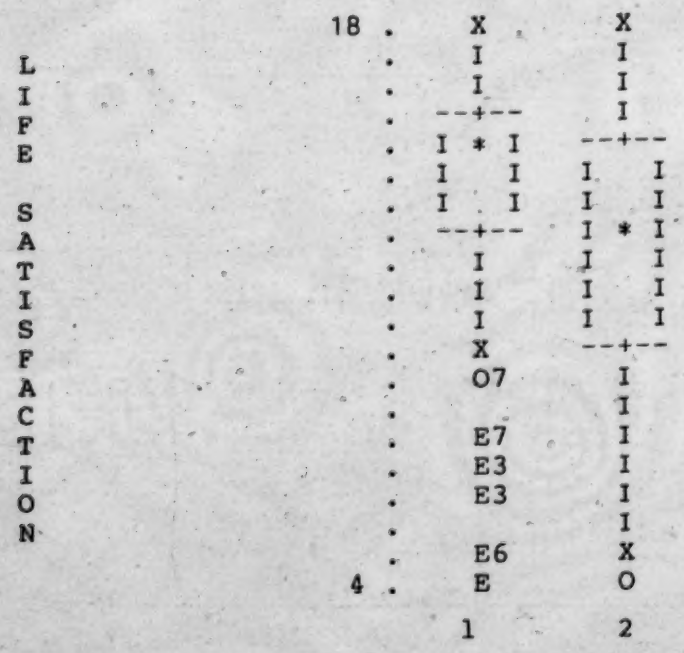
The medians for categories 2, 3 and 4 are in the lower quartile of category 1. The H spread and range for all 4 categories are approximately the same. There are outliers in all 4 categories.

Perceived Adequacy of Network Contact

Variable 12: Would you like help in obtaining friendly visiting at home?

	%	N
No	79	477
Yes	20	121

Desire for Friendly Visiting



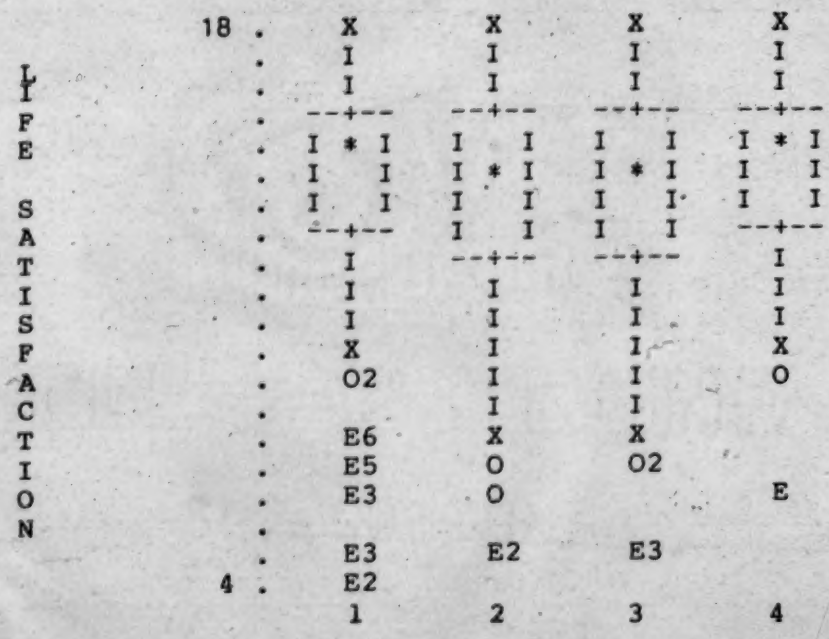
Variable 12

The median for category 2 is equal to the outer hinge of category 1. There is a much larger H spread for category 2. There are a great many outliers in category 1. The range for category 2 is from 5 to 18 while the range for category 1 is approximately 7 to 18.

Variable 13: How important is it to you to have close friends that you see regularly?

		%	N
1.	very important	44	266
2.	fairly important	32	192
3.	somewhat important	18	108
4.	not important at all	6	35

Importance of Seeing Close Friends



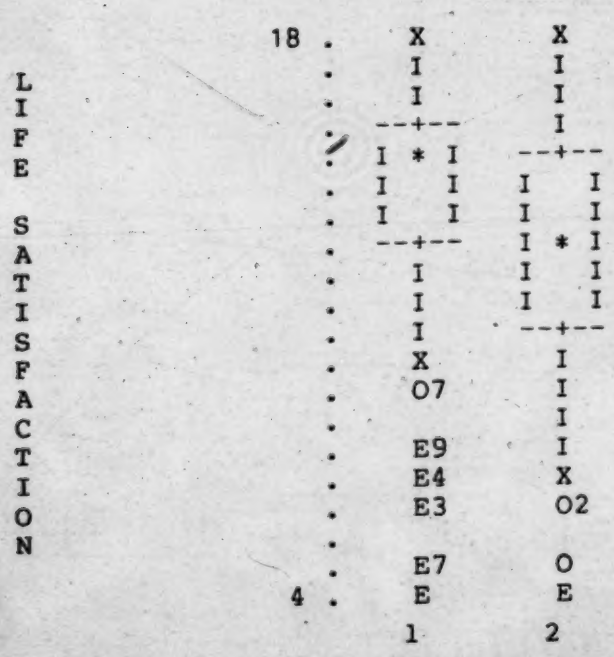
Variable 13

The medians for this variable are approximately the same. The H spreads are approximately the same. The most outliers are in category 1. The range is the same for category 1 and 4 and the ranges for category 2 and 3 are the same.

Variable 14: Would more companionship give you a more pleasant life?

	%	N
1. no	82	499
2. yes	18	100

More Companionship



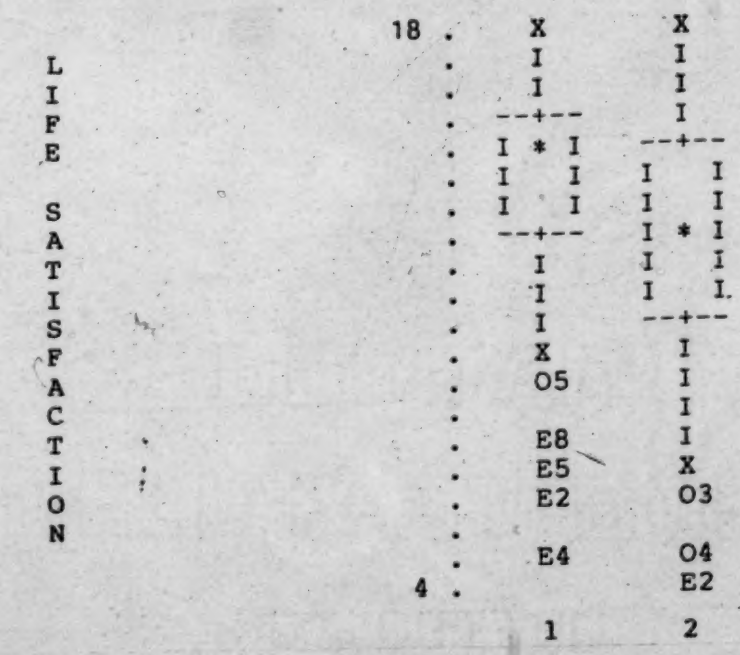
Variable 14

The median for category 2 is on the lower hinge for category 1. The H spread for category 2 is the largest. There are more outliers in category 1 than category 2. The range for category 1 is in the higher or more satisfied range than category 2.

Variable 15: Do you think that you see enough of your friends, relatives and neighbours?

	%	N
1. yes	77	463
2. no	23	138

Adequacy of Contact with Friends, Relatives and Neighbours



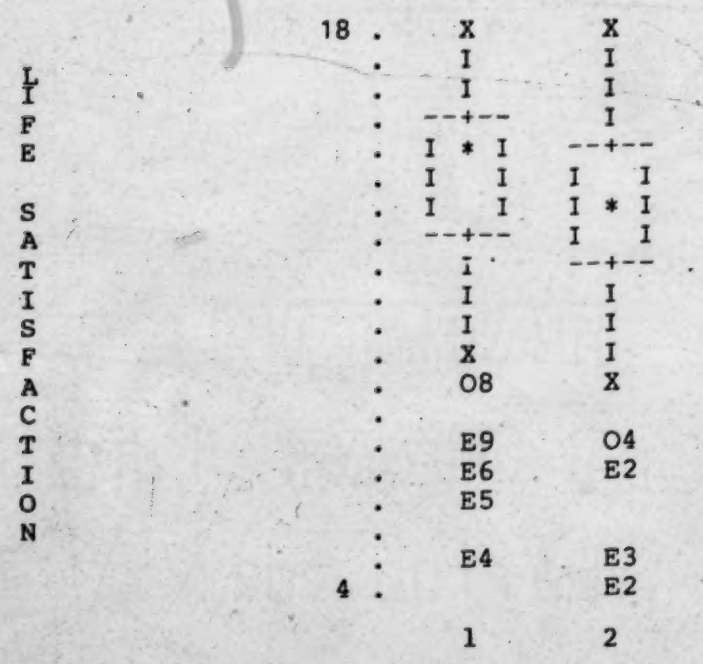
Variable 15

The median for category 2 is on the lower hinge of category 1. The H spread for category 2 is larger than category 1. There are outliers in both categories but more in category 1. The range for category 2 is the largest.

Variable 16: Do you have as much contact as you would like with a person that you feel close to, somebody that you can trust?

	%	N
Yes	81	485
No	19	112

Contact with Confidant



Variable 16

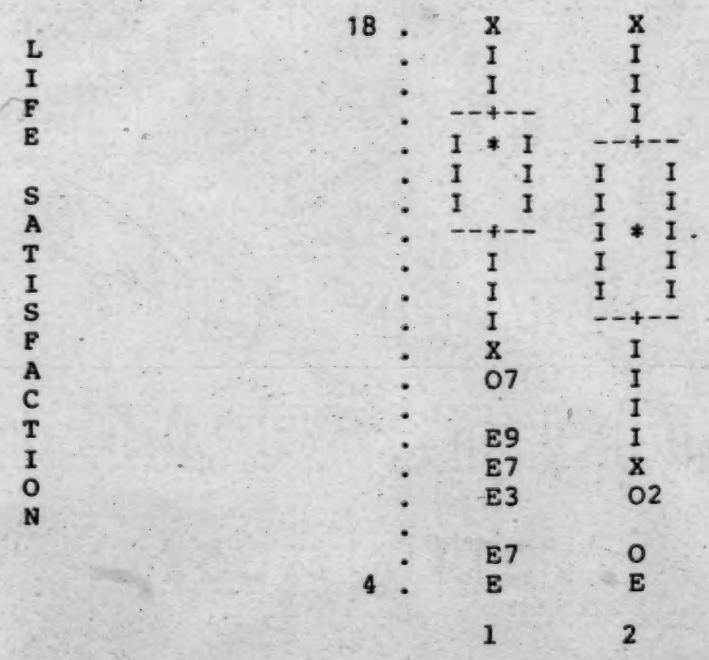
The median for category 2 is in the lower quartile of category 1. The H spread is approximately the same. The range for both categories is approximately the same. There are outliers in both categories.

Perceived Access to Network

Variable 17: Are friends a convenient distance from where you live?

		%	N
1.	yes	88	527
2.	no	12	70

Access to Friends



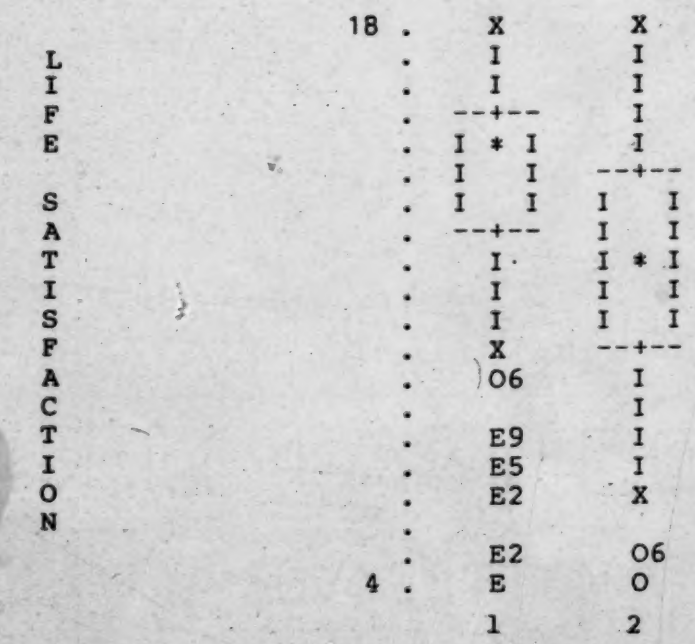
Variable 17

The median for category 2 is on the lower hinge for category 1. The H spread for category 2 is the larger. There are outliers in both categories but the most outliers are in category 1.

Variable 18: Can you easily get to places you want to go that are not within walking distance by car or public transportation?

		%	N
1.	yes	86	515
2.	no	14	79

Access to Network



Variable 18

The median for category 2 is below the lower hinge of category 1. The H spread and range for category 2 are larger. Most outliers are in category 1.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine what facets of the social network of elderly Albertans are associated with life satisfaction of the elderly. In general, we found:

1. Size and frequency of contact with one's network were not associated with the elderlys' life satisfaction.

2. Perceived adequacy of contact with one's network was associated with the elderlys' life satisfaction.

3. Perceived access to one's network is associated with life satisfaction.

Size and Frequency of Network Contact

It appears that in our sample, elderly peoples' satisfaction was not directly related to frequency of family visits. In fact, a medium number of visits with family members (a few times a week) seemed to be optimal. There were also individuals who were very dissatisfied even though they saw their family members every day. It may be that duty or obligation made the interaction negative for some.

> Aid given to children by older parents may well constitute a drain on the finances, time and energy of the parents. However, such aid may also increase feelings of usefulness, self-worth and independence among the elderly. The evidence that they are able to selflessly contribute to the well being of others, particularly their own children would seem likely to enhance the life satisfaction of the elderly. Aid received from children, however, may indicate dependence on children for goods and services which the parents cannot provide for themselves. They may feel that they are draining their children's resources, particularly if the aid they receive is extensive and unreciprocated.

It seems possible that both of these factors were operating in this study as well, resulting in a lack of relationship between quantity of contact and life satisfaction.

This study has added to the growing body of literature that amount of contact with children is not related to life satisfaction. However, it was important to note that 82% of the elderly in this study saw their children in the past week. This and other studies have shown a high contact rate that indicates that much of this cohort of elderly people is not isolated. This may be why researchers continue to find little relation between amount of contact and life satisfaction.

It was noteworthy in this study that the 11% of the sample who had no children had as high life satisfaction as

those elderly who had children and saw them within the previous week. It may be that another part of the network substitutes for the absence of children.

Similar to the findings of contact with children, neither numbers of close friends, nor frequency of contact with friends were related to life satisfaction. The only exception was in the extremes when there were no friends or no contact with friends. In that case life satisfaction was considerably lower. In addition, life satisfaction was not related to the neighbours who were friends nor frequency of visits with them. This finding supports that of Arling (1976) who also found no relationship between amount of contact with friends and life satisfaction. Size of friendship network may not be as important but there must be a network. It was only those without a network or without network contact who had relatively low satisfaction.

Life satisfaction in this study was also unrelated to the presence of a confidant and to the amount of attendance at organizations. Mancini (1980) felt that the contact with a confidant could be the most important underlying factor in satisfaction with one's network. In addition, exchange theorists would say that a confidant relationship is likely to be power balanced and one of more satisfying exchange; in theory a satisfying relationship.

Although in this study the presence of a confidant was

not related to life satisfaction, confidant relationships were not unimportant. Adequacy of contact discussed in a subsequent section was related to life satisfaction.

Future research might focus on a group having little or no contact. It would be interesting to look at the relationship between life satisfaction and elderlys' low contact with their social network. Is it possible to be highly satisfied with little contact with family and friends? Do elderly people who have low contact with their social network find other means of achieving high satisfaction.

Perceived Adequacy

All of these findings on size and network contact suggest that it was not the size of network nor the amount of time a person saw this network that was related to life satisfaction. Rather it was the expectation of these relationships which affected life satisfaction.

In this study those elderly people who desired more contact with friends tended to be more dissatisfied with their lives. Thus perceived adequacy of contact appeared to be more important than actual frequency. For example, those who said they did not see enough of friends and neighbours had lower life satisfaction than those who saw contact as adequate. The same pattern applies to neighbours. Likewise, it is not the existence of a confidant, but perceived

adequacy of contact which was associated with life satisfaction. Elderly people who participated regularly in voluntary organizations tended also to report greater life satisfaction.

This study agrees with Mancini's (1980) study in that contact is not related to life satisfaction but instead the important mediating factor is the desire for more contact. This finding is important for its implications of putting theory into practice. As practitioners, we must not view the elderly as a homogeneous group nor can services be provided for the elderly without keeping in mind the importance of expectations and choice. For example, we cannot assume that all elderly people wish to see more of their network. Rather, it is an individual's expectations which should determine the amount of contact. Practitioners cannot predict life satisfaction by sizes and frequency of contact. As exchange theorists we realize that exchange is necessary but that there must be a balance of rewards and costs in order for this relationship to be satisfying. Elderly people develop expectations of relationships and it is these expectations which are related to life satisfaction.

Another study could be completed on the twenty percent of the elderly persons who felt that they did not have enough contact with their network. To take this number of elderly people and do a case study, developing an interest in why

they feel they did not see enough of their network. Also another aspect would be to look at what qualities these relationships comprised of and their importance to the elderly. Once this was discovered possible substitute relationships could be found.

Perceived Access to Network

In order to exchange, one must be able to gain access to exchange networks. Like adequacy of contact, whether or not people are accessible is a personal issue which apparently has little to nothing to do with distance.

In this study those elderly persons who thought that places were not a convenient distance or were not accessible by car or public transportation were more dissatisfied.

When you look at perceived accessibility of the social network through an exchange theorist's view, it is known that in order to have an exchange you must have contact. Social interaction is the principal medium through which activities and sentiments are exchanged. The means by which most rewards are obtained is through interaction with other people. As exchange theorists, we believe that some contact must be maintained in order to have rewards. Social interaction is the medium by which costs and rewards are exchanged thus these networks must be viewed as accessible by the elderly. Despite this fact, apparently some people are

relatively dissatisfied with the nature of those exchanges.

Accessibility could be both physical and emotional. Although it may be easier to measure physical distance it would be important as parctitioners to be aware of possible emotional or social factors which might make networks unavailable. For example, an elderly women may live next door to a senior citizens centsre but if she views herself not as a senior, this network may be physically accessible but emotionally distant.

As researchers, we could measure the distances of elderly people from certain services and network. It would be interesting to discover what distance is viewed as accessible to the elderly.

An interesting concept which has received attention in the last decade is that of old/young housing. Exchange theorists would say that there is the opportunity of exchange but these exchanges may not be a satisfying relationships. These relationships are physcially accessible but possibly emotionally inaccessible.

Conclusion

When earlier researchers studied contact with network, some suggested that contact with different parts of the network was likely to be more satisfying. Friends were often cited as the group to provide high satisfaction. Our finding

in this study that contact with any part of the network was unrelated to life satisfaction indicates that we should move away from counting networks once and for all.

As researchers, it is time we examine our own biases; when is enough contact enough. It is only through studying perceptions of adequacy of elderly people themselves that we can come to any reasonable conclusion about how much is enough and with whom.

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APPENDIX A

LIST OF INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Variable 1: How often did you visit in person with a member of your family last week?

1. everyday
2. a few times a week
3. once a week
4. not at all

Variable 2: How many children do you still have living?

1. 0
2. 1
3. 2
4. 3
5. 4
6. 5
7. 6
8. 7

Variable 3: Amount child contacted (seen, phone call or letter).

1. today
2. within past week
3. within past month
4. several times a year
5. never
6. no children

Variable 4: About how many people do you consider close friends?

1. 1 - 5
2. 6 - 10
3. 11 or more
4. none

Variable 5: About how often do you go to visit these friends in their homes?

1. daily
2. weekly
3. several times a month
4. several times in one year

Variable 6: About how many neighbours would you say are your personal friends?

1. 1 - 5
2. 6 - 10
3. 11 or more
4. none

Variable 7: Of all your neighbours, about how many do you know well enough to visit with?

1. 5 or more
2. 3 or more

Variable 8: About how often do your neighbours come to visit in your home?

1. daily
2. weekly
3. several times a month
4. several times in one year

Variable 9: How often did you visit with your friends and neighbours last week?

1. everyday
2. a few times
3. once
4. not at all

Variable 10: Is there one person that you feel particularly close to...that is somebody that you can be completely yourself with and in whom you have complete trust and confidence?

1. yes
2. no

Variable 11: About how often do you go to meetings or activities of clubs, other organizations or informal gatherings or groups?

1. a few times a week
2. once a week
3. 2 or 3 times a week
4. once a month or less

Variable 12: What things would you like help in obtaining if the services were available to you?

Friendly Visiting at Home

1. no
2. yes

Variable 13: How important is it to you to have close friends that you see regularly?

1. very important
2. fairly important

3. somewhat important
4. not important at all

Variable 14: Wwould more companionship give you a more pleasant life?

1. no
2. yes

Variable 15: Do you think that you see enough of your friends, relatives and neighbours?

1. yes
2. no

Variable 16: Do you have as much contact as you would like with a person that you feel close to, somebody that you can trust?

1. yes
2. no

Variable 17: Are friends a convenient distance from where you live?

1. yes
2. no

Variable 18: Can you easily get to places you want to go that are not within walking distance by car or public transportation?

1. yes
2. no

APPENDIX B

RESULTS OF FACTOR ANALYSIS FOR LIFE SATISFACTION SCALE

Variable Name	Factor
Sex	.01958
Age	.16108
Education	.21046
Country	.12898
Occupation	.01745
Marst	.11474
Mor 1	.68256 *
Mor 6	.49380
Depend 2	.16782
Depend 3	.62028 *
T Rel 1	.07724
T Child 2	.01940
T Bro 2	.06568
T Sis 2	.17503
T Rel 2	.08932
Socnet 18	.16275
Depend 17	.08290
Socnet 19	.05900
Socnet 20	.00720
Socnet 21	.08801
Socnet 22	.01800

Variable Name	Factor
Socnet 23	.17858
Socnet 26	.13329
Socnet 28	.13190
Socnet 32	.16109
Socnet 33	.02373
Socnet 38	.21721
Socnet 40	.50266 *
Neigh 1	.37590
Neigh 2	.29970
Health 1	.29857
Health 6	.54167 *
Health 7	.36595
Health 19	.51949 *
Gen 1	.35770
Gen 3	.46461
Gen 4	.46333
Gen 5	.58748 *
Gen 7	.40191

APPENDIX C

DEPENDENT VARIABLE: LIFE SATISFACTION

A good scale eliminates all factors where Pearson Correlation p value is below .5. Thus the following variables comprise the scale:

Mor 1 — 1. How would you describe your satisfaction with life in general?

1. poor
2. fair
3. good
4. excellent

Depend 3 — 2. Are you able to do most of the things that you enjoy doing?

1. not very often
2. sometimes
3. usually

Gen 5 — 3. How satisfied would you say you are with the way you spend your time

1. very dissatisfied
2. somewhat dissatisfied
3. somewhat satisfied
4. very satisfied

Socnet 40

4. How often do you find yourself feeling lonely?
   1. very often
   2. fairly often
   3. sometimes but not too often
   4. never or hardly ever

Health 6

5. In general, would you say that your health is:
   1. very good
   2. good
   3. average
   4. fair
   5. poor

Health 19

6. How much would you say that bad health prevents you from doing things you would like to be doing?
   1. most of the time
   2. about half the time
   3. once in awhile
   4. never